

Shut parliament for a year to close the tax gap

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Andrew Phillips, who sits in the Lords as [Lord Phillips of Sudbury](#) for the LibDems, joined us for the session of The People's Parliament last night and was one of the first to raise a question. His view was robust and firmly put: he reckoned that in his 17 years in the Lords he has helped pass tens of thousands of pages of legislation but said that despite that he thinks most MPs are "wet behind the ears" (his words) when engaged in this activity because, in his view, the problem is not a lack of legislation in this country but is the lack of enforcement of much of the legislation we have got.

He had a remedy to suggest: he reckoned parliament should close for a year (almost no one would notice right now it has so little to do) and MPs and the Lords should be sent out to see what is actually happening up and down this country. It will never happen of course, but in my response I supported his suggestion because, as I said at the time, if just some MPs went to spend some serious time at HMRC they'd realise just how massively understaffed it is and how vital it really is that it be allocated the funding for at least 20,000 new staff. Those people could make sure individual taxpayers get the service they need from HMRC. Vitally, they could also be engaged [in closing the tax gap.](#)

There would, I suggest, be no better way of defeating austerity in this country.

And there would be no better way of creating social justice.

Nor could we reduce inequality more effectively however long we tried.

As important, by showing that cheating did not pay we could change the moral climate of this country and in the process could create the level playing field on which all businesses have an equal chance of competing. That is the foundation of prosperity in the market sector of a mixed economy.

If that could be achieved by shutting parliament for a year I am all for it.